





GONDOPHARES

GONDOPHARES (OPers. Vindafarnah- “May he find glory”), Indo-Parthian king (20-46 C.E.) in Drangiana, Arachosia (qq.v.), and especially in the Punjab. He is known from the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, the Takht-i Bahi inscription, and coin-issues in silver and copper. Thomas, the Christian “apostle to India,” a carpenter, was after the crucifixion (probably 29 C.E.) sold into slavery to India, where his purchaser was the king Gondophares (Gudnaphar), mentioned together with his brother Gad. The apostle was entrusted with funds for building a palace, but spent them on relief of the poor. When called to account, he declared he had built the king a palace in heaven, but was threatened with severe punishment. Soon afterwards, however, the king’s brother Gad, thought to have died, had a vision of a splendid palace, and revived to plead for the apostle’s release. The latter then reputedly departed to Madras, where he is commemorated as a founder of the South Indian Christian community, and a church is named in his honor.

The chronology of Gondophares depends on the Takht-i Bahi Kharoṣṭhi inscription, erected under *erjhuna Kapa* (prince [?] Kapa), probably the Kushan chief Kujula Kadphises, a name variously spelt in inscriptions. The paramount ruler was Gondophares (gen. *maharayasa Guduvharasa*), then in the 26th year of his reign, and the 103rd of an era, no doubt of the Indo-Scythian emperor Azes I (see *azes*). This is now known to be identical with the current Indian “Vikrama” Era, of which year 1 corresponds to 57 B.C.E. Therefore the date of the inscription was 46 C.E. (103-57); and the accession year (for this area) of Gondophares 20 C.E., a result perfectly supporting the

*Acts of Thomas.*

Coins of Gondophares, and his Indo-Parthian successors, including Abdagases (q.v.), Orthagnes, and Pacores, besides minor rulers, are widely distributed in the territories described. The numismatic sequence suggests that after the demise of the last Indo-Scythian emperor Azes II, not long before C.E. 5, local rulers such as Indravarma and Sasan in Avacapura (Bajaur), Zeionises in Taxila, Kharahostes, and the Kushan prince Kujula Kadphises west of the Indus, were competing for domination of Gandhara (q.v.). Kujula seems, on the evidence of one coin-find (Marshall, II, 820, nos. 258-60, III, Pl. 243), to have penetrated briefly to Taxila, but was soon expelled by Gondophares. The latter, descending from Drangiana, set up in the former Indo-Scythia an Indo-Parthian realm which survived until about C.E. 60. Subordinates mentioned on his coins include again Gadana (= Gad?), and Sasan. Partisans of Gondophares show on their coins the so-called “Gondophares symbol” , while those of Kujula use a different device .

Ernst Herzfeld maintained that the dynasty of Gondophares represented the house of Suren, highest of the five premier families of Arsacid Iran, invested with the hereditary right of commanding the royal armies, and placing the crown on the king's head at the coronation. Probably when around 129 B.C.E. nomad peoples, especially the Indo-Scythians (Sacaraucae; OPers. Sakaravaka “nomadic Saka,” or Saraucae) and the Tochari, attacked the eastern frontier of Parthia, defense was entrusted by the Arsacid kings to the Surens; and the latter eventually not only repelled the Indo-Scythians, but pursued them into Arachosia and the Punjab, this event probably representing *interitus Saraucarum* “the perishing of the Sacaraucae” of Trogus (*Prologue* 42).

Echoes of these events are preserved in the legends of the Sistān cycle, partly incorporated in the *Šāh-nāma*, but once also surviving as independent epics, such as the *Garšāsp-nāma* mentioned in the *Tāriḵ-e Sistān* (p. 5), and the *Ketāb al-Sakisarān* cited by Mas'udi (*Moruj*, ed. Pellat, secs. 541, 543). These related the deeds of the hero Garšāsp and his descendants, Narimān, Sām, Zāl or Dastān, and above all of the latter's son Rostam. It is difficult to relate the Indo-Parthian names known from coins and history to those of the epic, which are possibly honorific titles, since a recently reported silver coin describes Gondophares (spelt in Greek script Hyndopharres) as “surnamed” Sām. A single ruler may of course have received more than one such title, and the historical names may be repeated in succeeding generations. Indeed, an



interesting case had been made that there were several kings called Gondophares named on different coin issues (MacDowall, p. 143).

See also indo-parthian and indo-scythian dynasties.

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